



Dealing with Criticism and Difficult Situations

DEALING WITH CRITICISM FROM OTHERS

1. Listen and acknowledge the criticism. Bear in mind that:-

- a) criticism is an opinion – not necessarily fact. You could say, “That’ s one way of looking at it” .
- b) there is a possibility that the other person is right – e.g. “You could be right about that” .
- c) there is always room for improvement, no one is perfect. “Yes, I could do that differently” .
- d) show understanding by putting yourself in other person’ s shoes. “I can see this is causing you some distress or inconvenience” .
- e) admit genuine errors. “Yes, that is wrong” .

Do not respond to anything said which implies that you are a not an OK person.

2. Define the problem. Ask for facts. The object is to get the other person to tell us what their ‘Parent / Child Ego State’ is annoyed or upset about.

i.e. aim for discussion via your Adult Ego State – which is unemotional and problem solving.

Use specific questions like ‘who, what, are you, when, how, where, do you?’

but NOT ‘WHY?’ (risks eliciting Critical Parent)

e.g. “Are you disappointed with the way things have turned out between us?”

“Do you feel rejected because I’ ve said no?”

“What exactly are you dissatisfied with?”

SOME DO’ S AND DON’ TS FOR ASSERTIVE WORD SELECTION

DO

Do say “No” politely and firmly

Do express feelings honestly:

e.g. “I’ m angry”

“I’ m disappointed”

“I’ m delighted”

“I enjoy being with you”

Do be realistic, respectful and honest:

e.g. “This is the third month in a row your report has been late”

“Thank you for asking. I prefer no smoking in my car”

Do express preferences and priorities:

e.g. “I don’ t have a particular film to suggest. I do want to avoid violent ones”

DON’ T

Don’ t say “I can’ t” or “I won’ t be able to”

Don’ t depersonalise feelings or deny ownership:

e.g. “You make me mad”

“That’ s disappointing”

“That’ s delightful”

“You make me feel so good”

Don’ t exaggerate, minimise, or use sarcasm:

e.g. “You are never on time with your reports”

“We wouldn’ t want to strain your will power”

Don’ t defer to be sociable or agree unwillingly:

e.g. “I don’ t care – whatever everyone else wants is all right with me”

STROKES (TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS)

One of our basic needs, which originate in infancy, is to be recognised and acknowledged by other people. In Transactional analysis, the simplest unit of recognition, a verbal exchange, a smile, nod or touch is called a stroke.

Strokes can be positive or negative. Positive strokes assist the well being of the recipient. Negative strokes create bad feelings.

Strokes can also be conditional or unconditional. Conditional strokes have to 'earned' by doing something. Unconditional strokes are purely spontaneous.

Everybody has a stroke need and each person is different. A shortage of strokes will lead to changed behaviour in search of the deficiency. Different people respond to different stroking patterns.

It should be observed that people will seek negative strokes rather than no strokes at all. This helps to explain strange behaviour patterns, the people who seem to thrive on being put down or criticised.

Strokes must be genuine and part of authentic behaviour. Lavish praise for a good report from a subordinate who knows that the report is no better than usual will be seen as a crooked stroke.

The importance of strokes is that the validity of the concept is easily recognised. Consider, for example, that you have been away on holiday. On your return you will expect your colleagues / friends to display a different pattern of exchanges other than "Good morning" You will expect them to say "did you enjoy your holiday, how are the family . . . ! If one of your colleagues just says "Good morning" and goes back to his work you will feel concern.

Many people 'save' strokes. The saving of positive strokes helps to earn a guilt free indulgence of some form (new clothes, holiday etc). Those who save 'negative' strokes (either because of their life position or because of the stroking pattern at work) will feel able to indulge a bout of 'rebellious' behaviour.

It is possible that many problems of morale can be traced to the stroking pattern in an organisation, family or group of people. If recognition of existence and achievement is lacking people will start to channel energy into disruptive behaviour if only to achieve negative recognition. The concept of strokes is one of the bricks on which transactional analysis is built.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF RECOGNITION (STROKES)

<u>CONDITIONAL</u>	<u>POSITIVE</u>	<u>UNCONDITIONAL</u>
"This is a good report"	"I love you"	
"Your desk looks really tidy"	"You' re a really nice person"	
"Your figures are very accurate"	"I like to have you around"	
"I like the way you handled that customer"	"You' re a lot of fun"	
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"You' ve made a poor job of this"	"I hate you!"	
"Your shoes are dirty; get them cleaned"	"I can' t stand the sight of you"	
"This is full of mistakes"	"You make me feel sick"	
"That' s the second time you' ve been late; improve or else . . . !"	"Clear off!"	
	<u>NEGATIVE</u>	

BODY LANGUAGE SIGNALS

NON-ASSERTIVE

POSTURE

- slumped
- shoulders forward
- shifting often
- chin down
- sitting: legs entwined

GESTURES

- fluttering hands
- twisting motions
- shoulder shrugs
- frequent head nodding

FACIAL EXPRESSION

- lifted eyebrows
- pleading look, wide-eyed
- rapid blinking
- nervous or guilty smile
- chewing lower lip
- shows anger with averted eyes, blushing, guilty look

VOICE

- quiet, soft, higher pitch
- 'ers' , 'ahs' , hesitations
- stopping in 'midstream'
- nervous laughter
- statements sound like questions with voice tone rising at the end

ASSERTIVE

- erect but relaxed
- shoulders straight
- few shifts, comfortable
- head straight or slight tilt
- sitting: legs together or crossed

- casual hand movements
- relaxed hands
- hands open, palms out
- occasional head nodding

- relaxed, thoughtful
- caring or concerned look
- few blinks
- genuine smile
- relaxed mouth
- shows anger with flashing eyes, serious look, slight flush of colour

- resonant, firm, pleasant
- smooth, even-flowing
- comfortable delivery
- laughter only with humour
- voice tones stay even when making statement

AGGRESSIVE

- erect, tense, rigid
- shoulders back
- jerky shifts or firm in place
- chin up or thrust forward
- sitting: heels on desk, hands behind head or tensely leaning forward

- chopping or jabbing with hands
- clenched hands or pointing
- sweeping arms
- sharp, quick nods

- furrowed brow, tight jaw,
- tense look
- unblinking glare
- patronising or sarcastic smile
- tight lips
- shows anger with dis-approving scowl, very firm mouth or bared teeth, extreme flush

- steely quiet or loud, harsh
- harsh, 'biting off' words
- precise measured delivery
- sarcastic laughter
- statements sound like orders or pronouncements

20 STRESSBUSTERS

1. Work off stress through sensible, non-competitive physical activity and exercise
2. Talk to someone you really trust or use a Helpline
3. Learn to accept what you cannot change, including your own limitations and 'the world'
4. Avoid self medication with nicotine, alcohol or too much coffee
5. Get enough sleep and rest to recharge your batteries
6. Take time out for yourself
7. Spoil yourself – give yourself a treat
8. Deal with one thing at a time
9. Agree with somebody. Life is better when it is not a constant battleground
10. Make sure you have a time management system
11. Plan ahead. Don't take on things which will pile on the pressure
12. If you are ill, don't try to carry on as if you are not
13. Develop a leisure activity, some types of work are addictive and need a counterbalance
14. Be realistic about perfection; it is rarely attainable
15. Eat sensibly and don't miss meals
16. Learn to relax and practise every day – it is important!
17. Don't be afraid to say no. None of us is superhuman
18. Know when you are tired and do something about it
19. Delegate responsibility, even if the job may not be done just the way you like it
20. The answer lies with YOU – nobody else can give you a less stressful life

TIPS FOR EVERYDAY USE

- ◇ Lower your breathing and keep it gentle
- ◇ Drop your shoulders, keep your hands relaxed, loosen your jaw, allow your lips and tongue to soften
- ◇ Take your time and don't rush at things
- ◇ Enjoy every pleasant feeling and sensation

Self help Resources

Life is highly pressurised, so it is understandable that most of us need to learn how to release the strains it puts on us. Distress occurs at the point when perceived demands made upon us outweigh our perceived ability to cope with these demands. Note the word 'perceived' here, as the way we perceive the demands is the key to whether we take them in our stride or feel unable to cope with them.

BOOKS

The Stress Workbook	Joanne Gutman. Sheldon Press
The Good Stress Guide	Mary Hartley. Sheldon Press
Stress and Relaxation	Jane Madders. Optima Publishing
Manage your Mind. The Mental Fitness Guide	Gillian Butler and Tony Hope. Oxford University Press

AUDIO-TAPES

Coping with Stress at Work

(2 tapes – 70 minutes Ref:Z9).

Available from Talking Life, P.O. Box 1, Wirral, L47 7DD. Tel: 0151 632 1206

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